



Research Article

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Psychological Security Among University Students: Highlighting Pre-Service Teachers of Children with Disabilities and Pre-School Children

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Abstract

A survey of psychological security among pre-service teachers is significant for policy-makers in health and education services sectors to certify skilled teachers to work with children. So, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service special education and early childhood teachers. A descriptive method design was adopted. A survey was used to collect data about the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service teachers. Participants of the study were 216 special education and early childhood teachers. Results showed that teachers cited average levels of PS and 10.6 % of all participants had a low level of PS. Teachers rated thinking about the future, life being interesting, love between people, and unknown things as problematic issues in PS. Results revealed no statistically significant mean differences due to gender, average achievement or religious commitment. Recommendations for field and future research are presented.

Keywords: psychological security, mental health, youth, special education, preschool, teacher

1. Introduction

Psychological Security (PS) is a central feature of mental health and is vital to shaping a healthy personality (Al-Agraa, 2005). The PS concept appears from the hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow (1943) that once security need are not met, a person may develop feelings of being threatened, may feel anxious and may not seek higher level needs.

Adolescence is considered a challenging phase of development characterised by insecurity (Brown & Clute, 2003). Many college students have psychological problems which may have interrupted their education (University of Maryland Counseling Center, 2011) due to numerous life transitions as well as stressors that could increase the risk of substance abuse (SA) (Hunt et al., 2010).

Jordanian studies have reported many challenges faced by pre-service teachers which could affect their PS, such as negative attitudes towards their specialisation (Al-Zboon, 2018), exposure to abuse during childhood (Al-Zboon, Ahmad & Al-Dababneh, 2015) and substance abuse (Al-Zboon &

Al-Dababneh, 2017). Many Jordanian studies have also (e.g., Al-Jaddou, 2015; Abu-Nair, 2016) indicated that humanistic specialist students suffer from a shortage of opportunities and services, marginalisation and negative attitudes. This status will negatively influence the quality of life of future teachers, who will already experience burnout and chronic stress (Onder & Sari, 2009). This stress causes diseases and mental health problems, and sufferers become fatigued and may leave the job (Brown, Howcroft, & Jacobs, 2009).

Having a high level of PS is a characteristic of a teacher's creative personality (Farella, 2010) and is connected with teachers' performance (Hamre & Pianta, 2004) and the efficiency of the educational process. Achieving this environment requires teachers with acceptable PS levels, so, investigating PS prevalence during pre-service teacher training will offer vital information.

Some universities become actively involved in providing mental health services (MacKean, 2011; Al-Zboon, 2017). Programmes contain support services for students with mental health issues and counselling centres (Harris et al., 2010), which have accomplished much in supporting university students to complete their education (Perron et al., 2011). Unfortunately, there little such service for students in Jordanian universities, with a particular lack of mental health services and substance abuse education at university (Al-Zboon & Al-Dababneh, 2017; Al-Zboon, 2017).

A survey of PS among pre-service teachers is significant for policy-makers in health and education services sectors to certify skilled teachers to work with children (Wilcox, Putnam, & Wigle, 2003). There is also a gap in knowledge of the prevalence of PS among university students, so we have to investigate this topic to offer robust data to assist in bridging this gap. This study reports the findings of a survey which aimed at exploring teachers' PS by asking:

- 1- What is the level of PS among SE and ECE teachers?
- 2- Does the level of PS in teachers differ due to the teacher's gender, achievement level, and religious commitment?

2. Contextual Framework

Jordan faces political and economic problems, which have increased recent years following the arrival of refugees from conflicts in bordering countries (Al Khateeb, & Hadidi, 2015). This has affected the health and education services. Jordanian universities cannot afford to conduct PS programmes and give them low priority because of the economic situation (Al-Zboon & Al-Dababneh, 2017); as Tumuti et al. (2014) reported, such programmes are extremely costly. This contextual atmosphere will negatively affect the PS, as it is a status in which individuals feel that their environment is safe and free from threat (Maslow, Hirsh, Stein, & Honigmann, 1945).

The Hashemite University has the Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood (QRFFC) which contain two departments: special education (SE) and early childhood (EC). Teacher preparation programmes at QRFFC are introduced at the undergraduate level as a four-year programme of study. These programmes prepare students to be teachers of children with disabilities or pre-school children. Much Jordanian research has reported the importance of the reformation process for these programmes (e.g., Al-Zboon, & Ahmad, 2015; Fayez, Takash & Al-Zboon, 2014).

3. Methods

3.1 Design

This study adopted a descriptive method design. A survey was used to collect data about the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service teachers. Independent variables of the study were teacher's gender, achievement level, and religious commitment. The dependent variable was the level of psychological security.

3.2 Sampling

The study used purposive sampling to select participants. The sample comprised 216 pre-service teachers (175 female and 41 male) who agreed to complete a questionnaire. Participants of the study were 96 special education and 120 early childhood teachers (table 1) . The study was considered by the research ethics principles of the institutional review board (IRB) of The Hashemite University and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration.

Table 1. Sample description

	N	Percentages
Gender		
Female	175	81%
Male	41	19%
Achievement		
Weak	47	21.8%
Average	121	56%
High	48	22.2%
Specialisation		
Special education	96	44.4%
Early childhood	120	55.6%
Religious commitment		
Weak	26	12%
Average	137	63.4%
High	53	24.5%
Total	216	100%

3.3 Instrumentation

The study used a modified PS scale (Shqaer, 2005) which contains 2 sections (socio-demographic variables and 33 scale items) based on a five-point Likert scale. The scale achieved an accepted validity and stability score. The designer of the scale gives reliability indicators for the total scale (0.89). In our study, Cronbach's alpha was (0.94). To determine content validity, experts were asked to review the items and provide feedback to the authors. Items were revised until there was 100% agreement among the reviewers on both the content validity and the wording of each item and its suitability to the Jordanian context.

3.4 Research procedures

The survey was conducted during the second semester of 2017-2018. The questionnaires were distributed to students in their classes. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Data generated from the instrument was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Multiple statistical tests were conducted, namely frequency, percentages, means, t-tests and univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). All research procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the research ethics standards of the institutional review board (IRB) of The Hashemite University/Jordan and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments.

4. Results

The total mean score for teachers' responses on the scale that measures level of PS was 3.60, which indicates that teachers cited average levels of PS. Teachers rated 'My respect for myself causes me to

feel secure' as a best item of the PS scale with a mean score of 4.6, followed by 'the country's security causes me to feel secure' with a mean score of 4.56. Teachers rated 'thinking about the future causes me to worry' as the lowest item with a mean score (2.27), followed by 'life is exhausting and boring' (2.49), 'I feel that love between people is rare' (2.56), 'I feel that life is big burden' (2.96), and 'I feel fear of unknown things' (2.37).

To determine the level of PS among teachers, the total score was calculated for each participant. Results revealed that 10.6 % of all participants had a low level of PS.

Regarding teachers' gender, independent sample t-tests were conducted and showed no statistically significant mean differences between male and female respondents ($t = 1.08, p < 0.71$).

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of PC According to Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	Female	175	3.6220	.48104
	Male	41	3.5327	.43912

Table 3. Independent Samples Test of the Effect of Gender on Teachers' Perceptions of PC.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Total	.139	.710	1.087	214	.278	.08927	.08215	-.07267	.25120
			1.150	64.483	.254	.08927	.07762	-.06578	.24431

A One-Way ANOVA was administered to help determine the influence of the average of achievement on the total PS subscale score. The omnibus ANOVA statistic for this analysis revealed no statistically significant differences that could be attributed to an average of achievement on the total PS variable for teachers ($F = 1.91, p < 0.150$).

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Perceptions of PC According to Average of Achievement.

Average of achievement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Weak	47	3.4950	.46095
Average	121	3.6527	.46780
High	48	3.5927	.49154
Total	216	3.6051	.47369

Table 5. F-test of the Effect of Average of Achievement on Teachers' Perceptions of PC.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.852	2	.426	1.915	.150
Within Groups	47.390	213	.222		
Total	48.242	215			

With regard to religious commitment, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted. Results revealed no statistically significant mean differences due to religious commitment regarding PS as seen by

teachers ($F = 1.644, p = 0.196$).

Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Perceptions of PC According to Religious Commitment

Religious commitment	N	Maen	Std. Deviation
Weak	26	3.4879	.56019
Average	137	3.5953	.45199
High	53	3.6878	.47796
Total	216	3.6051	.47369

Table 7. F-test of the Effect of Religious Commitment on Teachers' Perceptions of PC.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.733	2	.367	1.644	.196
Within Groups	47.508	213	.223		
Total	48.242	215			

5. Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of psychological security of Jordanian pre-service special education and early childhood teachers. Results indicate that participants cited an average level of PS. This is consistent with the results obtained by Bani Mustafa and Al-Sharefain (2013), which indicated that the level of PS among university students was moderate. The results also revealed that 10.6 % of all participants had a low level of PS. This result is worrying. Identification of the students with low levels of PS is a primary step that will help the university deal with those students who will be the future teachers of two critical groups, children with disabilities and pre-school children. Farella (2010) reported that having a high feeling of security is one of the characteristics of a teacher's creative personality which is linked with the effectiveness of educational process. So, if the educational community wants a high-quality teacher and safe environment for children, it has to identify and deal with teachers with PS problems in the pre-service period. Unfortunately, Al-Zboon and Al-Dababneh (2017) reported a lack of psychological services in Jordanian universities, so universities should focus on providing suitable services for their students who are in a critical period of their lives.

Teachers rated thinking of the future, life being interesting, love between people, and unknown things as problematic issues in PS. This result is rational and could be attributed to the contextual factors of Jordanian people, such as high rates of unemployment, economics and the regional political situation. Thinking about the future for educational and humanistic specialist students could be explained by their suffering from negative attitudes, marginalisation in the community (Al-Jaddou, 2015; Abu-Nair, 2016), lack of job opportunities and low salary.

Results of t-tests revealed no statistically significant mean differences between men and women, average of achievement or religious commitment regarding PS as perceived by pre-service teachers. This result indicated that these are marginal factors in PS level. The literature differs in regard to the effect of these factors. For example, Bani Mustafa and Al-Sharefain (2013) showed differences in the level of PS due to educational achievement and gender, for high achievement and being male, respectively. While Omar (2014) showed that PS among secondary education students did not differ according to gender and specialisation.

However, this result is expected as the literature has reported that PS is connected with other factors, especially early childhood experiences, family state, economic and political factors. There is general agreement on several affecting factors in the PS, mainly genetics and the environment (Aql, 2009). Socialisation is considered an important factor as childhood experiences and parental patterns and styles of treatment of the child have an important effect on PS (Alnawasre, 2016). Another factor

is a safe educational institution which contains suitable circumstances for the development of students' psychophysical characteristics. So, this process is an exchangeable relationship; the educational environment which teachers bring up in the past will affect their PS, and this will impact on their students' PS in the future.

6. Conclusions and Implications

Overall, the results of this preliminary study highlight that teachers cited average levels of PS and 10.6 % of all participants had a low level of PS. Teachers rated thinking about the future, life being interesting, love between people, and unknown things as problematic issues in PS. Results revealed no statistically significant mean differences due to gender, average achievement or religious commitment. This indicates that these are marginal factors in PS levels. There is a need to study the contributing factors in PS level by qualitative methods. Evaluation of the availability and quality of university psychological services has to be made, and there is an obvious need to continue this line of investigation. It is also crucial to continue to study PS, which may be of particular importance to countries newly concerned with providing a safe environment for children.

Teacher education programmes have to respond to teachers' needs by providing psychological programmes at universities for student with problems with PS, including SE and EC teachers who will have a job that is known to be challenging, tense and stressful.

1. *Compliance with ethical standards:*

1.1. Conflict of interest: author A declares that she has no conflict of interest. Author B declares that she has no conflict of interest.

1.2. Ethical approval: all procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the research ethics standards of the institutional review board (IRB) of The Hashemite University and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments.

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